

# Wind-White Salmon Watershed, WRIA 29

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Wind-White Salmon Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Wind-White Salmon Watershed, located in southwest Washington, consists of the Wind and White Salmon Rivers and numerous tributary creeks and streams.

Annual precipitation in WRIA 29 ranges from 20 inches per year along the Columbia River in southeast Skamania County to 140 inches per year in the Cascade Mountains. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when overall water demands are the lowest. During the summer, snow pack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

This watershed is one of the most intensely farmed basins in southwestern Washington and has seen increasing population over the past 20 years. As a result much of the water in the Wind-White Salmon Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, low summer and early fall streamflow levels, and impacts from climate change add to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 29, especially during the summer months.

## Factors affecting water availability

There is currently no instream flow rule for the Wind-White Salmon River Watershed, which includes the Rock Creek subbasin. There is also no water set aside in reserves for future uses.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has recommended restrictions for most of the Wind-White Salmon watershed. See [RCW 77.57.020](#) for additional information. These restrictions are referred to as Surface Water Source Limitations (SWSL), and apply also to groundwater connected to surface water.



## Definitions

**Instream flows:** Flow levels adopted into an administrative rule that create a water right for the stream to protect fish, wildlife, stock watering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values. Typical instream flow rules now include broader water management strategies.

**Mitigation:** A scientifically-sound plan to offset the impacts of a proposed water use.

**Subbasins:** smaller drainage basins that together make up a WRIA. Subbasins are generally named for the principle creek or other surface water that runoff flows to.

**WRIA:** Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental administration and planning purposes, Washington is divided up into 62 major watersheds, or WRIsAs.

Often these restrictions will require that new water uses stop during low flow periods. The following river and creek basins are identified by SWSL as being restricted to new uses:

- Buck Creek
- Rock Creek
- Trout Creek
- Two unnamed streams that are tributaries to Collins Creek
- Two unnamed streams that are tributaries to the Columbia River

Applicants seeking new water appropriations for other uses will likely need to mitigate for the impacts their proposed water use will have on surface water bodies and existing groundwater withdrawals.

### **Water supply available for new uses**

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of ground water (most commonly, single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf).

Additional options for finding a water supply, including more expedited processing of new or change applications include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Refer to [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf).

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf).

### **Pending water right applications in this watershed**

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received.

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change\\_transfer\\_use.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html)

The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications.

Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer) <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>
- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr\\_app\\_rss.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html)
- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools  
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLSWebMap/default.aspx>

### **For more information**

Ecology Southwest Regional Office  
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360-407-6300

*If you need this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872.  
Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.*

